About the Artist: Selwyn Muru

PHOTO BY MARGARET NEPIA-MURU

Selwyn Muru (Ngāti Kuri, Te Aupōuri), one of New Zealand's most senior Māori artists, is a tribal repository of knowledge, painter, sculptor, playwright, musician, pioneer broadcaster, fisherman, educator, and former orator for New Zealand's governor-general, Sir Anand Satyanand.

Muru first studied art under Katerina Mataira at Northland College. He later founded Te Toi Hou, the Māori Art Department at Elam School of Fine Arts, and taught Māori whaikōrero (oratory) classes for the University of Auckland's Māori Studies Department; he was also official Māori orator for the University of Auckland. He acted alongside Kiri Te Kanawa in the film *Runaway*. He wrote the first Māori-language play to be televised, *To Ohaki o Niho,* and several other plays in English that were brought to the stage in New Zealand, including *The Ballad of Tupou, The Gospel According to Tane*, and *Get the Hell Home Boy*. He produced and directed many documentaries for radio and television, and his art has been represented in numerous national and international exhibitions, including the first Johannesburg Art Biennale in 1995.

Some of his work, including paintings from his 1970s *Parihaka* series (featured in this issue), is rooted in specific Māori tribal knowledge and the enduring legacy of colonialism and loss of land in New Zealand. Other works have protested international issues such as nuclear testing in the Pacific or the apartheid regime in South Africa. Also prominent among his legacy are more humorous works, such as his seven-meter-high *Waharoa* (Gateway), embellished with carved animals, musical instruments, and poetry for Auckland's Aotea Square and the quirky carved palisade that surrounded his home in Freeman's Bay. For Muru, "Māori art has always been contemporary"—it circulates ideas and remains forever relevant through the ways we think and interact with it.

MOANA NEPIA

The art featured in this issue can be viewed in full color in the online versions.

Te Whiti and Titokowaru Drawing Inspiration from the Mountain, by Selwyn Muru, 1975–1977.

Oil on board, 1218 mm × 982 mm. Photograph by La Gonda Studios.

Reproduced courtesy of the artist.

On 9 June 2017, 135 years after government troops invaded and violently decimated the Māori settlement of Parihaka (and at the time this issue of the journal was about to go to press), a Crown apology was finally offered to the people of Parihaka. The gesture is more than symbolic: an additional deed of reconciliation, legacy statement, ongoing relationship agreements with local and national government, a development fund, and legislation are being put in place to ensure that the Crown's commitment is legally binding. Parihaka Papakainga Trust Chair Puna Wano-Bryant's declaration of a "new dawn" echoed sentiments expressed at the time of Parihaka's founding. The cover image depicts two important prophets, peacemakers, and leaders of nonviolent resistance in this story: Te Whiti o Rongomai, who helped establish Parihaka with Tohu Kakahi, and their colleague Riwha Titokowaru, who was blind in one eye, and who was arguably "the best general New Zealand has ever produced" (James Belich, in Te Ara: The Encyclopedia of New Zealand [http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/1t101/titokowaru-riwha]).

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Te Whiti and Tohu, by Selwyn Muru, 1975–1977.

Oil on board, 1200 mm x 900 mm. Photograph by La Gonda Studios.

Reproduced courtesy of the artist and a private collector.

Te Whiti o Rongomai and Tohu Kakahi were appointed by Taranaki iwi (tribes) in 1865 to lead a nonviolent resistance movement against the New Zealand government's proclamation of war and confiscation of Māori land. They helped to develop a prosperous agricultural community at Parihaka, encouraged the plowing up of confiscated land, and repaired fences that the armed constabulary had broken. Numerous arrests and imprisonments without trial followed. Crown troops invading Parihaka in 1881 were met with children singing and dancing and villagers sitting on the ground. Te Whiti and Tohu were charged with sedition and imprisoned until 1883. Over 1,600 people were expelled, houses and cultivations were destroyed, and "some 5,000 acres of land were taken by the courts as compensation for 'suppressing the . . . Parihaka sedition'" (Taranaki Iwi Trust [http://taranaki.iwi.nz/taranaki-iwi-history/]).

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Homage to Captain John Bryce, by Selwyn Muru, 1975–1977.
Oil on board, 1217 mm x 1390 mm. Photograph by La Gonda Studios.
Reproduced courtesy of the artist.

Muru's depiction of the invasion of Parihaka on 5 November 1881 under the command of John Bryce with armed forces and dogs resonates with media representations of more contemporary atrocities in West Papua, Chechnya, and Standing Rock. This work also represents a demonstration of nonviolent resistance that occurred three generations before Mahatma Gandhi's protests against the British Empire. Many New Zealanders remain unaware of this part of their national history. Others suggest a day of commemoration for Parihaka should replace the current November 5th celebrations of Guy Fawkes Day.

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Tangihanga Parihaka, by Selwyn Muru, 1975–1977.

Oil on board, 1220 mm x 894 mm. Photograph by La Gonda Studios.

Reproduced courtesy of the artist.

Tangihanga (ritual mourning practices) for Māori bring forth memories of loved ones recently departed and tīpuna (ancestors) from more distant times, while seeking to alleviate the grief of those left behind. For the people of Parihaka, nineteenth-century New Zealand government acts of violence, including wars against Taranaki iwi (tribes), remain painful memories to this day. More recent histories of rights and titles to land being eroded through discriminatory acts of legislation and inadequate offers of compensation compound this sense of grief.

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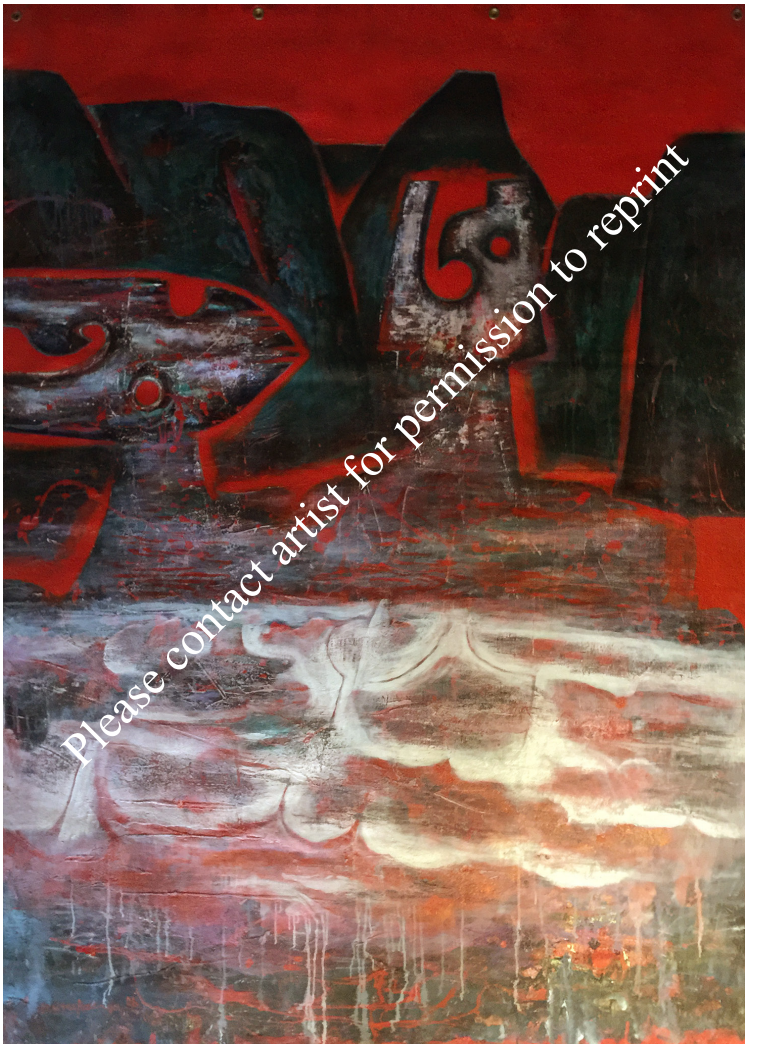
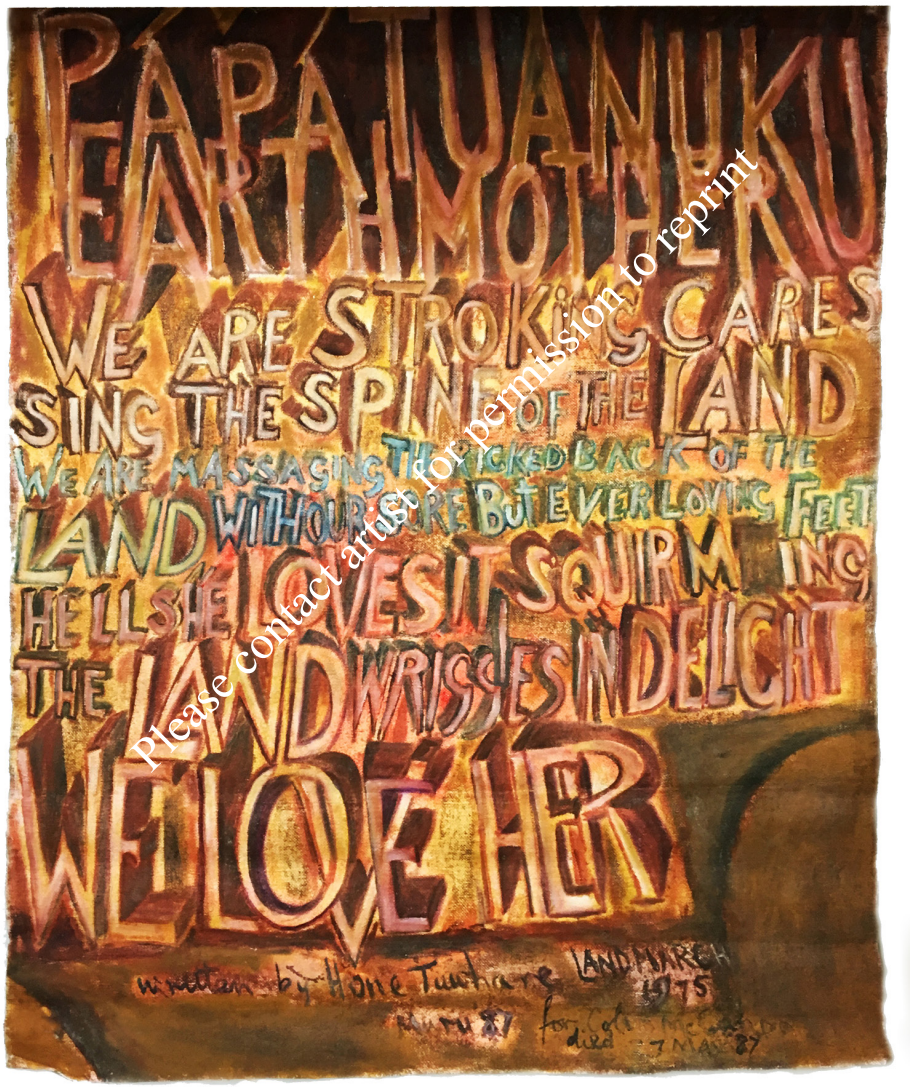


Untitled, by Selwyn Muru, 1986.

Oil on unstretched canvas, 1800 mm x 1350 mm. Photograph by Moana Nepia.

Reproduced courtesy of the artist.

In this untitled work, stylized figures emerging out of an abstract landscape reiterate ancestral connections to whenua (land) and reveal traces of Muru's creative whakapapa (genealogy). Citing influences on his work from twentieth-century European artists such as Constantin Brancusi and Pablo Picasso, Australian painter Sidney Nolan, and New Zealander Colin McCahon, Muru also shared an interest in developing painterly and sculptural language based on forms found within customary whakairo (carving) and kōwhaiwhai (painting) with other Māori artists such as Paratene Matchitt, Buck Nin, Fred Graham, Cliff Whiting, Arnold Wilson, Sandy Adsett, and John Bevan Ford.



Papatuanuku Earth Mother, by Selwyn Muru, 1987.

Oil and acrylic on unstretched canvas, 1050 mm x 930 mm. Photograph by Moana Nepia.

Reproduced courtesy of the artist.

Dedicated to New Zealand painter Colin McCahon, whom Muru remembers encouraging Māori artists such as himself in the 1960s and '70s, this painting also reveals Muru's affection for the poet Hone Tuwhare (a tribal relation) and his work: "Kupu Pākehā, whakaaro Māori, his words may be English, it's the thought that makes it Māori . . . English is our language too" (Muru, pers comm, Auckland, 2010).

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(A) How's Your Father, by Selwyn Muru, 2016.

Oil, acrylic, ink on wood, 800 mm x 490 mm x 80mm.

Photograph by La Gonda Studios. Reproduced courtesy of the artist and a private collector.

(B) How's Your Father, by Selwyn Muru, circa 1983.

Mixed media, approximately 800 mm x 490 mm x 50mm.

Photograph by Kees Sprengers, for Ngā Puna Waihanga, New Zealand Maori Artists and Writers Society. Reproduced courtesy of the artist and a private collector.

How's Your Father began life as a delicate, wall-mounted sculptural work in the 1980s. It evolved over thirty years with hundreds of layers of paint into a heavily encrusted work embodying Muru's love of color and endless fascination with painting as process. Successive variations were a focus for conversation and constant source of amusement in the family home. According to Muru, "There's not enough whimsy in the world" (pers comm, Auckland, 2003).

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